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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/10/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [NL](#)
SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFGHANISTAN: CONCERN OVER RUMORED
RC-SOUTH COMMAND CHANGES

REF: A. 04-07-08 DAILY TELEGRAPH ARTICLE
[1B.](#) 04-09-08 GRUBB-SHEA E-MAIL
[1C.](#) USDAO THE HAGUE NL IIR 6 868 0226 08

Classified By: CDA Michael Gallagher, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[11.](#) (SBU) This is a request for guidance. Please see para 8.

[12.](#) (S//NF) Summary: The GONL is concerned about rumors expressed in a recent Daily Telegraph article laying out U.S./UK plans to replace the Dutch during their upcoming command rotation of NATO operations in southern Afghanistan. According to MFA Task Force Uruzgan Coordinator Pieter-Jan Kleiweg, the GONL has held off responding to the rumors for as long as possible, but will need to address them next week due to increased parliamentary interest. He indicated a forward-leaning U.S. statement expressing confidence in the upcoming Dutch command rotation -- or a convincing explanation otherwise -- would be helpful in addressing anticipated parliamentary concerns. Kleiweg discussed these issues with polmiloff on April 9. End Summary.

[13.](#) (S//NF) Kleiweg called to express concern over ref A article suggesting the United States and United Kingdom have decided to replace the Dutch with the British in its nine-month turn in the command rotation responsible for Regional Command South (RC-South), Afghanistan, starting in November 2008. According to the Telegraph article, the USG and UK "have concerns about the rotating leadership, believing the mission needs greater 'continuity of command'." The article also quotes an "insider" as stating the Dutch lack the "necessary experience at the leadership level" to lead RC-South.

[14.](#) (S//NF) Kleiweg repeated many arguments expressed by Dutch MOD working level contacts (ref B e-mail), notably that the Dutch had heard rumors for some time regarding U.S./UK plans to revise the RC-South command rotation. Kleiweg confirmed that no GONL official has officially been approached by US or UK officials regarding the possibility of the UK taking over the Dutch turn in the command rotation in November 2008; as a result, the GONL has not officially responded to the Telegraph article. However, given greater attention in the parliament and press, Kleiweg said the GONL is coming under

increasing pressure to address the issue directly.

¶5. (S//NF) Kleiweg acknowledged that from a "continuity of command" perspective, it makes sense for the British or Americans to eventually assume longer-term command of RC-South, and to lengthen command rotations, especially as the number of U.S./UK troops increases and Dutch and Canadian forces in the region are rotated out. However, Kleiweg argued that the command arrangement currently works, and questioned why it required revision -- especially now, immediately prior to the Dutch rotation. Did the Dutch and Gen. van Loon not do a good job during the last Dutch rotation, Kleiweg asked? He noted that the rumors -- if true -- will send a strong message to the Dutch that the USG does not trust placing its troops under Dutch command. Such a signal will be "impossible to explain" to the Dutch parliament. Kleiweg also questioned how this lack of confidence might affect ISAF as a NATO mission.

¶6. (S//NF) Kleiweg noted that the MFA and MOD will appear before the Dutch parliament on April 16 for an Afghanistan update, and anticipated tough questions as a result of the Telegraph article. Polmiloff shared EUR/PPD press guidance, noting that "on the question of Dutch leadership and experience, (the USG) reject(s) the views expressed in this article; the Netherlands has demonstrated strong leadership during their rotation in the lead in the south." Kleiweg appreciated these points, but noted that they do little to suggest U.S. confidence in the next Dutch rotation or other future operations.

¶7. (S//NF) Kleiweg anticipated that command issues would be thoroughly discussed during RC-South meetings in Ottawa at the end of the month, but noted the Dutch timeline on the

issue revolves around the parliamentary session on April 16. He questioned whether it might be possible to obtain a forward-leaning statement from the USG expressing confidence in the next Dutch RC-South command rotation. If not, he hoped the USG could provide a convincing explanation otherwise.

COMMENT

¶8. (S//NF) As noted in reftel C, the Dutch are proceeding under the assumption that they will assume command of RC-South in November 2008, and will likely state as much to Parliament on April 16. While the Dutch will be prepared to address new proposals at the upcoming RC-South meeting in Ottawa April 28-29, they obviously do not want to be blind-sided, especially now that rumors of a possible change in the command structure are out in the open. If significant changes to the current structure are indeed under consideration, Post recommends that Washington consider consulting with the Dutch prior to the April 28-29 meetings, if possible. Post also would appreciate guidance to address the GONL's concerns prior to the April 16 parliamentary session.
Gallagher